Cyber-Activism: Loos Identity and Strong Iconography

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Abstract

The cyber-activist collective Anonymous has created a powerful visual representation through the use of three key symbols: the mask, the headless suit logo, and its signature. Those images appear in almost all the campaigns launched by the collective and are part of Anonymous' visual identity, becoming important carriers of identification, which is understood here according to Kenneth Burke's theory. In this paper, I argue that, through the use of those symbols as means to promote identification, Anonymous created a cyber-activist brand that can be used by anyone who wishes to use the name and appeal of the collective to promote his/her message.

1. Introduction

Seen in protests from all over the world, Anonymous presents itself as a cyber-activist collective without a fixed ideology. The collective makes use of cyber-activists practices and have a culture of its own and, in a phenomena that can be explained through identification, Anonymous was able to gather a massive community around its campaigns. Norton summaries the presence of the collective, its fluid identity, and its worldwide power in the following fragment:

Anonymous has broken the bounds of the digital and pushed its way out onto the streets, it has become a radical movement unlike any other. It doesn't have a founding philosopher or a manifesto; there's no pledge or creed. It's true that Anonymous does have a politics, but it's hardly a specific platform—just a support for online freedom and a rage at anyone who tries to curtail it. No, what Anonymous has become, in reality, is a culture, one with its own distinctive iconography (the Fawkes masks, the headless man in the business suit), its own self-referential memes, its own coarse sense of humour. And as Anonymous campaigns have spread around the

world, so too has its culture, bringing its peculiar brand of cyber-rebellion to tech-savvy activists in Eastern Europe, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East. Like a plastic Fawkes mask, Anonymous is an identity that anyone can put on, whenever they want to join up with the invisible online horde.

Because of its loose identity and strong iconography, Anonymous has become a kind of brand that can be used to give credibility to any idea promoted under its symbols. As with any brand, visual identity plays an important role since it will determine how the organization will be recognized by others; and Anonymous has been doing a great job in this respect. The collective has created a wide range of audio-visual content by exploring symbols that already exist, in what is called a remix culture. This creation and re-appropriation are possible because of the digital nature of the Internet, which allows users to easily manipulate and re-purpose images. Joss Hands characterizes the remix possibilities as a culture which takes "all kinds of texts already in the public domain, and - with the aid of cheap consumer electronics - [cuts] them up, [sample] them and [mix] together, so that new contexts generate new meanings" (73).
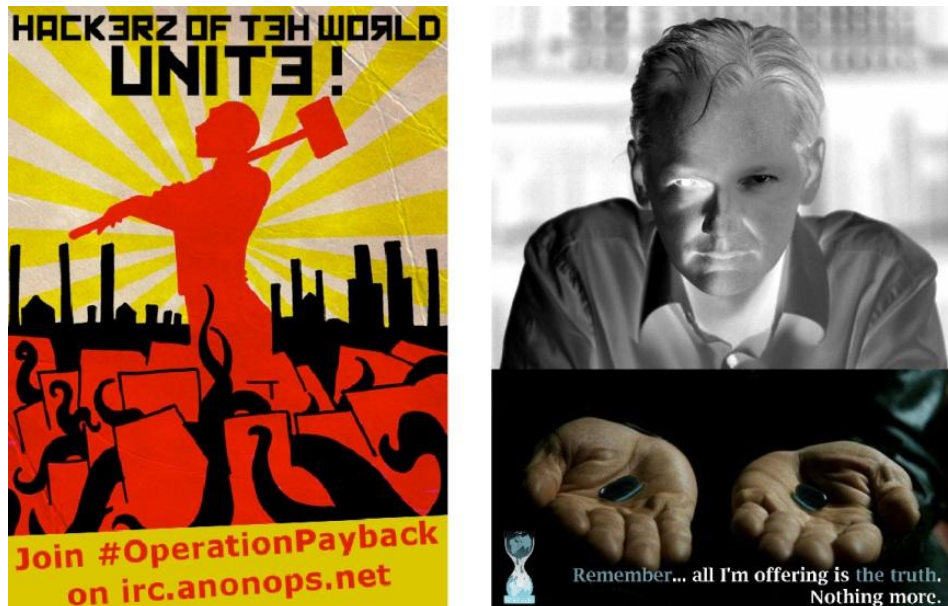

Figure 1 . Remix Culture as Used by Anonymous in #OperationPayBack Anonymous. "Propaganda Material". Oppaperstorm. Web. 03 Nov. 2015.1

Anonymous took the best out of the possibilities afforded by the remix culture and the web in order to create powerful images and symbols that stand for the collective as well as its campaigns. For instance, Gabriella Coleman ("Aesthetic") affirms Anonymous "would be far weaker as a phe-

nomenon without the masks, without their fantastic art work, without those videos", and adds that "Anonymous is a faceless phenomenon that is everywhere represented via their artistic output". Thus, the importance of the visual identity created by the collective is part of its power.

As a result, the symbols are important carriers of identification, since they allow the transfer of one's energy from the image to the collective, reinforcing the process of community-gathering. Moreover, as those symbols are usually based on pre-existent icons, people can engage with the content in a critical manner, making associations and building meanings from what is already known about the images. Anonymous' symbols can be analysed in terms of kinds of identification and strategies, according to the definitions that I discuss below. In this paper, I focus on the three main symbols used by Anonymous: the Guy Fawkes mask, the headless suit in front of what look likes the United Nations logo, and Anonymous' signature. Those symbols pervade all the campaigns created by Anonymous. Before moving to the analysis of the symbols, it is important to understand how identification operates.

2. Burke's Identification

The use of identification as a mean to persuade has been observed since Ancient Greece, when Aristotle proclaimed the importance of using commonplaces and understanding the audience to promote persuasion. However, Aristotle concentrates his efforts in a rhetoric that is all about convincing and does not give particular attention to the term identification itself. It is Kenneth Burke who constructs a theoretical approach to rhetoric that has identification as the essential aspect of persuasion and, consequently, as the key term of his theory. Burke departs from a perspective based on drama that analyses the use of language as a symbolic system to induce co-operation among human beings.

In order to understand Burke's idea of identification, we should first look at his definition of human beings. Burke ("Man" 493) affirms that people are symbol-using animals whose experiences define the symbolic system used by them and who are in turn defined by it. The author also differentiates identity from the self, defining identity as a social product that is created through the symbolic interaction between individuals, whereas the existence of the self is denied. He affirms that "identity is an active process in which 'I' is merely a unique combination of potentially conflicting corporate 'we's'" (Attitudes 264). Thus, Burke situates people as a product of their social relations, ideologies, and contexts.

As a result of Burke's definition of man, we can see how the social aspect is important in his studies. It is this fact that sets identification as a key term in Burke's studies since he says that the function of rhetoric is to proclaim the unity of men who are by nature divided (Motives 22). Consequently, identification is the only mean of participating in collective acts, and is considered an essential part in the function of sociality (Burke, Attitudes 267). Furthermore, Jay Jordan explains that identification is important "to a wide range of Burkean preoccupations: sacrifice, scapegoating, organisational behaviour, political affiliations, transcendence" (267). Thus, identification works to bring people together and move them collectively towards the same ideal.

Though the origins of the term identification are in the word identity, it is not about similarity, but joint interests. Burke defines identification by saying: "A is not identical with his colleague, B. But insofar as their interests are joined, A is identified with B. Or he may identify himself with B even when their interests are not joined, if he assumes that they are, or is persuaded to believe so" (Motives 20). Nevertheless, the identity of A or B is not excluded when they come together because of shared interests, being them at the same time consubstantial and independent individuals. Gary Woodward summarises the concept by saying that identification "creates spikes of decisive recognition that can bind us to specific sources, while affirming the boundaries of our own recognised world" (5).

Burke also explains that as the natural division of human beings is the origin of the necessity of identification, both division and identification are constantly subordinate to each other (Motives 22). It is interesting to notice that even the associations formed through identification imply division since people organise themselves in groups that are usually distinguished from other groups, creating an antagonism between "them" and "us". As a consequence, identification offers an attempt to overcome division at the same time that perpetuates it (Jordan 269). In other words, identification results simultaneously in sociality and rivalry, since people tend to tie themselves to the perspective created by a group, at the same time that they ignore or reject other angles.

Keeping in mind the idea of what Burke's identification means, we can move on to the categories that can help to analyse how it appears in imagetic discourse. Here, I am going to develop two taxonomies related to the term: the kinds of identification, which implies how the symbolic system is used and perceived by human beings, and the strategies that can be

used to promote identification. I develop each of these categories in this section, but they can be summarised in the following table.

Table 1. Identification Taxonomies

Identification		
Kinds	Mechanical	Unconscious association between symbols and ideas.
	Analogical	Use of different frameworks to discuss a category.
	Ideological	Creation of a symbolic system that will give meaning to other symbols.
Strategies	Similarity	Emphases is given to resemblance (i.e., demographic).
	Commonality	Shared perspective (i.e. same enemy).
	Hidden Division	Discourse hides tokens that induce identification..

The first important aspect of identification relates to how symbols will be interpreted by human minds in order to promote identification. Through this process of interpretation, the symbols will be associated with certain elements according to the critical approach used by the ones taking part in the symbolic act. Departing from this idea of associations, Burke presents three kinds of identification: mechanical, analogical, and ideological.

Mechanical: this kind of identification results from the simple association between an idea with a symbol or image. Woodward affirms that this kind of identification does not involve any critical thinking, being based on how previous experiences shape the way we interpret the world (29). Mechanical identification can be seen when a certain object is associated with a desired class status. For example, in Western culture, brands of cars are preferred according to the image that one has of oneself and wants to project to others. Consequently, mechanical identification can also show how symbols can be used to perform identity (Woodward 129).

Analogical: in this case, identification happens when "the principle of an order is transferred to another order" (Burke, Motives 133). Analogical identification uses a framework that does not belong to the category of the idea under discussion in order to re-contextualise the subject and give it a new meaning. For example, arguments are typically defined using a vocab-

ulary of conflict (i.e., argument is a fight), which moves them from the realm of an exchange of ideas to a battle in which only one side can win.

Ideological: this is the most abstract of the three kinds of identification. Burke defines rhetorical ideology as "a system of political or social ideas, framed and propounded for an ulterior purpose" (Motives 88). Thus, the ideological identification happens when a complete system, or cluster of signs, is created to represent a large idea that is used to order other signs. As an example, Christian conservative groups can attract people using an ideological form of identification by offering them a new ideological framework. Hence, as soon as they start to share the membership of this group, people will start to judge based on the views that the new framework considers natural or abnormal, creating a new organisation for their own worlds. Ideological systems are particularly good at giving meaning to signs that do not have a fixed position when it comes to good or bad per se, such as capitalism (Burke, Motives 184). Here, it is important to notice that this form of identification can happen in a subliminal way since ideological systems are often interiorised by individuals in an unconscious manner. For instance, Tony Thwaites mentions that ideologies are keen to address people as if they were already part of that system, leaving no choice to the addressee other than to accept his/her role as part of the group (162).

Woodward affirms that the analogical identification reframes one's experience, while the ideological renames it (33). When either one is in action, it is able to modify one's idea, showing the association between identification and identity. A modification in mind calls for an identity adjustment and a change of attitude, which has the power to change the way people perceive themselves and the world (Woodward 36; Ambrester 205). Thus, a successful identification can be noticed, at a superficial level, through explicit connections to the group, such as the use of the same vocabulary, and, at a deeper level, in the impact on the symbolic organisation of one's mind.

The three kinds of identification discussed can appear in discourse according to three different strategies. These strategies take into consideration how the audience will be attracted to an specific idea. As do all rhetorical acts, identification occurs when an audience can be addressed and, consequently, convinced. Although Burke points out that one can be one's own audience as long as s/he "cultivates certain ideas or images for the effect [s/he] hopes they may have upon [her/himself]" (Motives 38), rhetorical acts usually have external audiences that can be convinced. Hence, different strategies can be used, together or alone, to create identification with the

audience: 1) similarity — when points of resemblance are created among people; 2) commonality — when the audience shares a common ideal; and 3) terms that hide division — when a discourse implicitly moves the audience towards a sense of group (Woodward, 2003: 26). These strategic appeals happen when a speaker is able to talk the same language as the audience "by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your way with his" (Burke, Motives 55). By doing that, the speaker will identify his/her causes with the interests and opinions of the audience.

Burke summarise the three strategies in the following paragraph:

The first [similarity] is quite dull. It flowers in such usages as that of a politician who, though rich, tells humble constituents of his humble origins. The second kind of identification [commonality] involves the workings of antithesis, as when allies who would otherwise dispute among themselves join forces against a common enemy. This application also can serve to deflect criticism; a politician can call any criticism of his policies "unpatriotic", on the grounds that it reinforces the claims of the nation's enemies. But the major power of "identification" [terms that hidden division] derives from situations in which it goes unnoticed. My prime example is the word "we", as when the statement that "we" are at war includes under the same head soldiers who are getting killed and spectators who hope to making a killing in war stocks (*Dramatism* 28).

Here it is interesting to notice that the creation of enemies used in commonality is marked by the striving for perfection that defines human beings in the view of Burke. As so, people tend to create perfect enemies, entities that are not really people, but the embodiment of evil. The author exemplifies with the construction of Jews in Mein Kampf, by Hitler (Burke, "Man" 509) . A contemporary example would be the traditional conflicts between East and West and the creation of villains, such as Osama Bin Laden, as the personification of terrorism. As a consequence of the perfect enemies, there is the presence of the perfect victims, who can identify themselves with each other because of the shared enemy.

Regarding similarity, it is not only seen when an evident characteristic is shared among people, but also when people are invited to imagine themselves in a certain situation to build empathy with those who actually are in that situation, then being an abstract representation of similarity is created.

As a rhetorical appeal presented through the three strategies, identification can fail or succeed at four different levels: associative, admiring, sympathetic, and cathartic. The levels were developed by P. David Marshall in his scholarship about film studies (quoted in Woodward 49). However,

they are also useful in understanding social contexts since the three levels can define how people engage with a person or group. The terms are self-explicative and define the state of mind of the audience after receiving a message, implying diverse degrees of engagement with an idea. Though the final aim of identification, as described by Burke, is to move people towards some action, it only happens when associative identification is conquered. In this case, an individual not only identifies his/her views with the view of the group, but also becomes an active member of the organisation.

Burke's perspectives about identification can be applied to understand how Anonymous' symbols can operate as a brand and gather people towards the ideas promoted by the collective. In the following sections, I analyse the three main symbols one by one: the Guy Fawkes Mask, the Headless Man, and Anonymous' signature.

3. The Guy Fawkes Mask

Although many ideas are hidden behind the Guy Fawkes Mask, Gregg Housh, a not so anonymous Anon who was part of Chanology, the very first campaign created by Anonymous against The Church of Scientology, affirms that the icon was picked almost randomly by Anonymous. It happened when people in the collective faced the necessity of omitting their personal identities when protesting against Scientology on the streets, since it "had been claimed that Scientologists harassed mercilessly their critics" (Anonymous). Though some people argue that from the beginning the mask was part of a political decision, Housh says there was not a consensus about it and other suggestions were given, such as super hero masks (as quoted in Walker). However, when Anons decided to check the general availability of the masks in shops, the Guy Fawkes mask won.

As the collective grew stronger, the meaning of the mask started to make sense as part of Anonymous representation. Nowadays, the icon is used in many Anons' social media profiles and is also a common presence in street protests promoted and/or supported by the collective. Its power as a symbol is even challenged by governments, who have been banning masks in protest because of the massive appearance of Guy Fawkes masks. Such action was taken by the governments of Bahrain, Dubai, Canada, and even the United States, which used an old law to justify the banishment. As a matter of fact, the related charges can add up to ten years in prison in Canada (Fitzpatrick).

When it comes to identification, the Guy Fawkes mask can operate in two ways: mechanically and ideologically. Moreover, it also makes use of similarity and commonality as strategies. Among the operations, the ideo-

logical kind of identification is the most complex one, since it requires an understanding of the stories behind the mask, from the Gunpowder plot to the release of the movie *V for Vendetta* (2005), that make the icon a symbol of fighting against oppression. Noticeably, as part of a product created by the remix culture, the mask can also be considered according to the analogical identification. However, the subversion of frameworks in the case of this symbol does not affect its main ideological meaning.

Figure 2 . Guy Fawkes Mask as Designed by David Lloyd. Lloyd, David. "Guy Fawkes Mask on Black Background." xdesktopwallpapers. Web. 03 Nov. 2015.

The Guy Fawkes mask was created in memory of a catholic man, Guy Fawkes, who tried to blow up the English parliament in an attempt to kill King James I because of the religious intolerance that prevailed in England. However, Fawkes was betrayed by his fellows, arrested, and would have been executed if he had not committed suicide while waiting to be hanged. For many years, November 5th, the night intended for the Gun Powder Plot, the name given to the plan, has been celebrated in Great Britain. The festivities were not in honour of Fawkes, though, but to mock him and his attempt to kill the king. During those nights, an effigy of Guy Fawkes, using a mask to resemble his face, was burnt. However, history changed his fame and, as time passed, he became known as a figure that fought against the government, being considered by some as the last man with good intentions to walk through the British parliament. Currently, the mask is no longer mocked, but used as a symbol of dissent. But Guy Fawkes' story was not well-known outside the British Isles until 1980.

From that year to 1990, two well-known graphic novelists, Alan Moore and David Lloyd, decided to use the icon in their graphic novel, *V for Vendetta* (1989). Lloyd drew a version of the mask, the one that is seen on the streets nowadays, and the story reinforced the old ideology behind the symbol, the fight against oppression. In addition, the graphic novel embedded the mask in the question of how people can empower themselves and fight for their rights. *V for Vendetta*(1989) happens in a totalitarian Britain that uses minorities, such as homosexuals, in medical experiments and controls the lives of its citizens. In this scenario, V, the major character who uses the mask, appears as a dissent who fights against the government and teaches people how they should rule themselves. When the graphic novel was released, V became a popular character among geeks and comic

fans. However, it was the movie directed by James McTeigue and written by the Wachowski Brothers, released in 2005, that popularised the mask. The movie was based on the graphic novel, although some alterations were made. When it was released, the image of the mask and its ideology of fighting against oppressive governments were wide spread and those who could identify themselves with this ideology could also identify themselves with the Guy Fawkes mask, the major symbol of the movie and the graphic novel.

When Anonymous adopted the mask as its symbol through a random decision, the ideology worked well with their discourse in favour of freedom of speech. Though the context and framework were changed, which would count as an analogical identification, when an idea is removed from its original framework for another purpose, the ideology behind the symbol was still the same. As said by one Anon, the mask is no longer about blowing up governments, but it is still about giving the power back to people (Anonymous). In other words, the mask represents the fight against any kind of oppression. By making use of a symbol with such a strong ideological appeal, Anonymous could also use the strategy of commonality. In this case, people who identified themselves with the mask's ideology could transfer this energy to Anonymous itself since they had a shared interest represented by the Guy Fawkes mask.

Moreover, the Guy Fawkes mask holds an ample ideological perspective, making it appealing to a wide range of people. As Lloyd proposes, the mask carries no political view other than fighting against tyranny. He even adds that:

The important thing about that mask is that it's used on a widespread level by many people who just want to use it as an all-purpose symbol of resistance to tyranny, even of perceived tyranny. That's the most important thing about that mask. That's why it's been used in so many disparate groups. It's been used in anti-Scientology demonstrations, also used by Occupy Wall Street Movement, also used by protesters in Egypt and in China. [...] It only means that you are somebody that doesn't want to be run by an authoritarian government. That is most of us, and that's why that's so fantastic a symbol.

Noticeably, the loose ideological appeal of the mask is similar to the appeal of Anonymous, which promotes a wide range of campaigns with multiples perspectives; though most of them are connected to oppression.

Though the mask carries a strong power of ideological identification, it can also result in dissociation from Anonymous. It happens because at the

same time that the icon is used in fights against oppression and exploitation, it is also at the root of some exploitation systems. The symbol's copyright belongs to Time Warner, and the enterprise has been profiting from large sums of money due to the sales of the item. Moreover, the large scale production of the mask tends to exploit the vulnerabilities of third world countries. As an example, Figure 3 shows a picture of Guy Fawkes masks being mass produced in slums in Rio de Janeiro, it circulates on the web as an "somewhat ironic image" (Kelley).

Figure 3 - Assembly Line of Guy Fawkes Mask in São Gonçalo, Rio de Janeiro. Reuters. "Workers manufacture Guy Fawkes masks at a factory in São Gonçalo, Brazil in July". IbTimes. Web. 03 Nov. 2015.

People who work in assembly lines in slums tend to be low paid, a result of the poor labour division of neo-liberal globalisation. As a consequence, some people see the icon as an inconsistency when it comes to activism, causing dissociation from the Guy Fawkes mask, which can be passed on to Anonymous. In order to overcome such criticisms, Anonymous has been incentivising Anons to produce their own masks.

Despite the problematic nature of its production, the mask has become a popular symbol of Anonymous, being shared by many mainstream media as well as by Anonymous' social media profiles. Because of this massive use, it was able to promote a mechanical identification. In this case, no critical thinking is involved to associate the mask with Anonymous. Even if a person knows nothing about Guy Fawkes or *V for Vendetta* s/he can still associate the mask with Anonymous since it has become part of popular

culture. The mechanical association is possible because Anonymous has consolidated the message of the mask as its symbol. For instance, it is not difficult to see people calling it "the Anonymous mask" instead of referring back to Guy Fawkes or any version of *V for Vendetta*. In such cases, the mechanical kind of identification is deeply connected to the strategy of similarity. By using the mask, even without critical thinking about it or its ideology, one can have the feeling of belonging to the collective and, as said by Burke, social ties are the ultimate aim of human beings when interacting with each other.

Moreover, the sense of community created by the mask also has a political significance. When people deny their individual identities when protesting, they fully assume the role of citizens, forming a mass claiming for ideals. Thus, the mask does not represent an individual, but the full collective, and its presence can be summarised in one of the quotes from the movie: "beneath this mask there is more than flesh. Beneath this mask there is an idea, Mr. Creedy, and ideas are bullet-proof" (*V for Vendetta*). By becoming ideas, citizens are no longer targetable and subjected to repression, but act as a unison voice to express dissent, reinforcing the functions of sociality through identification and also strengthening Anonymous as a community.

4. The Headless Suit

Although the mask became the most well-known symbol of Anonymous, the collective's logo is in fact a headless man wearing a suit with a background that resembles the United Nations (UN) logo, and a question mark in the place where the head should be, as shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4 - Anonymous Logo and United Nations logo Huff, Jason. " Left: Anonymous logo, Right: United Nations logo". Rhizome. Web. 03 Nov. 2015.

Though the logo is not so popular as the mask, it still stands for Anonymous, appearing in its widely followed Twitter account, @AnonOps,

and used in some practices of e-graffiti. Thus, it deserves some consideration here. The logo was heavily marked by the remix culture since it re-appropriates the symbol of the UN in order to pass on Anonymous' message. As opposed to the mask, the logo is not widely discussed and does not have any historical background apart from the UN symbol. However, some interpretations can be found online.

Jason Huff (2011), for example, presents a theory, a bit forced, about Greek references, though none of the Anonymous channels or profiles has ever discussed such presences. As a matter of explanation, Huff argues that the man in the picture has no arms and the olive branches work as wings; though it seems that his arms are crossed on his back in a typical position of a business man while the olive branches are originally part of the UN logo. By reaching this conclusion, Huff argues that the image resembles Nike, the Greek goddess of victory. Meanwhile, other people affirm that the man is in fact an adaptation of a Reny Magritte painting, The Son of a Man (OhInternet). As no explanation can be found in Anonymous channels, it is difficult to affirm from where the image of the man came or what it represents. However, in the remix culture, interpretation is free so people tend to interpret symbols according to their own knowledge of world. What is clear about the faceless man is that it stands for anonymity and leaderlessness, two of the concepts defended by Anonymous.

It is also clear that the UN logo was used, and a few observations can be made about that without misinterpreting the image. The UN is an organisation that should promote cooperation among nations and stand for human rights in general. In times of globalisation, such organisations can be more powerful than countries. However, in recent times, the UN has been accused of corruption, support of dictatorships, lack of representation from some countries, and even omission in cases of genocide, such as in Rwanda. Consequently, when Anonymous creates its logo by using part of the UN logo, an analogical process occurs. That is, the ideals that the UN should fight for are now characterised as the dissenting voice of cyber-activism, while the UN involvement in scandals is interrogated. In such cases, identification may occur if an individual agrees with the new framework given to the logo of UN and accepts that the issues represented by UN, and consequently its logo, should be discussed by Anonymous. If this agreement is effective, analogical identification is seen through the use of a strategy of commonality, since people will share the same idea.

However, as with the mask, identification can also occur mechanically. In other words, people can recognise the logo as belonging to Anony-

mous and identify themselves with the group or with the idea behind the logo because they believe in what Anonymous proclaims. In the last case, Anonymous again works as a brand that gives credibility to causes using its name. Nevertheless, the appeal of the logo is much weaker than the one created by Guy Fawkes mask, which is able to represent a whole ideology. Even when it comes to the mechanical identification, the mask seems to be stronger than the logo since it is much more popular in mainstream media and is seen with more frequency as associated with Anonymous. The identification power carried by the mask is also stronger than the one present in the signature.

5. Anonymous' Signature

As with everything related to the origins of Anonymous, the signature of the cyber-activist collective came from 4chan, an Internet board created to share images and general content, more specifically from a set of rules called the "Rules of the Internet". The rules were created mainly for the sake of joy, but when Anonymous made its first video as an embryonic cyber-activist collective, rules 3, 4, and 5 appeared as part of its signature. Those rules are: 3) we are Anonymous, 4) Anonymous is legion, and 5) Anonymous never forgives. When adapted to Anonymous' signature it appeared as: We are Anonymous / We are legion / We do not forgive / We do not forget / Expect us. When the collective reached its cyber-activist fame, its signature became its catchphrase and is now seen in all of Anonymous' videos and most of its visual material.

The appeal promoted by the signature is made through the strategy of hidden division. As the catchphrase uses the pronoun we, it is expected that there will be a "they", a group that should expect Anonymous' actions; since the signature gives no other option, people are expected to take part in one of those groups, being with Anonymous or its target. The argument is even more compelling when presented by the "spectaclish orientation" (Coleman, "Aesthetic") that is often present in Anonymous' videos. Moreover, the signature can be reinforced by the lines: "The corrupt fear us / The honest support us / The heroic join us / We are Anonymous". By using this sequence, the distinction between "them" and "us" also becomes a question of good and bad, making it clear that if one wants to stand on the good side, s/he must be part of Anonymous. Of course, in real life individuals can also choose just to ignore the message, though the speech per se does not present that as an option. Consequently, the signature works as an ideological appeal in which a role is given as if the audience were already in this position; thus, denial is almost non-existent in terms of the message. Though the ide-

ological appeal is present, the ideological identification is not held by the signature since it has no ideological power if disconnected from the collective; so, the ideological appeal is in Anonymous as a collective, not in the signature itself.

The creation of two distinct groups through the use of the pronoun "we" makes the signature an interesting piece when it comes to identification as well as of its counterpart, division. In this piece, we have a clear example of how identification is able to create sociality and rivalry at the same time: the ones who agreed with the tagline and feel that they are part of Anonymous exercise socialisation; meanwhile, the ones on the other side will be seen as the corrupted people that Anonymous should fight against, appearing as the rival faction. Interestingly, the fragment which is sometimes used in association with the tagline, "The corrupt fear us / The honest support us / The heroic join us / We are Anonymous", offers the audience the possibility of engaging with Anonymous in different levels. Those levels can be compared to the ones proposed by Marshall, as mentioned by Woodward: associative, admiring, sympathetic, and cathartic. In this case, the associative is represented by the "heroic" ones who will join Anonymous, while the admiring and sympathetic levels are seen in the "honest" ones who support the cyber-activist collective. On its turn, the cathartic is seen on the ones who just completely ignore the message.

It is also important to notice that the signature operates as a mechanical kind of identification since it is automatically associated with Anonymous, and an individual can unconsciously accept it or not. The presence of a mechanical identification associated with the strategy of hidden division makes the signature quite strong when it is not considered critically, since both terms operate in an unconscious manner. In addition, the implicit creation of two distinct groups also induces the strategies of commonality and similarity. Commonality occurs when a person agrees to share in the name of Anonymous, and also accepts the other group as an enemy. Meanwhile, similarity is present in the idea of group itself and the sense of belonging to this faceless organisation.

The signature, like the logo, is also not so strong as the mask, though it is present in most of Anonymous publications and also used as sign of protests in the streets. It happens because the visual impact of the mask is much more significant since it has a strong ideological factor and also works to preserve one of the main characteristics of Anonymous as a collective, its culture of anonymity. However, even if the symbols vary regarding their power of appealing, it is undeniable that they are important in cre-

ating the image of Anonymous. Nowadays, this image is even seen as a brand inside the cyber-activist world.

6. Conclusion

These symbols all relate to a question that may not appear directly correlated to cyber-activism: how willing are you to buy a new product sold by a brand that you already like? It may sound awkward to discuss branding when talking about cyber-activism and its fight against neo-liberal globalisation and the negative side-effects of capitalism, but branding is what best defines the power of the symbols created by Anonymous; the difference is that the collective does not sell products, but promotes ideas.

By making an impressive use of the remix culture, Anonymous has created a powerful visual image and style now recognized all over the world. The symbols that were re-appropriated by Anons are even losing their own name and being labeled as Anonymous properties. When Anonymous consolidated its image and symbols, the collective created a strong brand image that can be associated with Anonymous' campaigns and messages. When people come together under the name of Anonymous, the collective starts to form part of their identities, creating a kind of brand identification with the name. The term, brand identification, is defined "as the degree to which the brand expresses and enhances consumers' identity" (Golob, Tukej, & Podnar 54). When it comes to cyberspace, the brand identification can define the way that a person will present him/herself through discourse. For sure, the influence exercised by Anonymous as a brand will vary according to the level of engagement, but it does exist as long as a person identifies him/herself with Anonymous.

It would be a simple question of brand identity if Anonymous were not a porous loose collective when it comes to participation. As everyone can write in the name of Anonymous and use its identity to promote his/her own ideas, branding allows a double process of identification: the symbols can make a person identify him/herself with Anonymous, but it can also make someone who is already engaged with Anonymous accept an idea promoted under the collective's visual identity. As those ideas are freely published and do not depend on the authorisation by a leader, they heavily rely on public acceptance to grow strong in cyberspace. This acceptance can be seen when a large number of people start to share an idea and it goes viral. Thus, being branded by Anonymous plays an important role in the legitimisation process that can decide if a cause will live or not on the Internet.

For instance, not all the campaigns that have been held by Anonymous were created by the collective. Some of those campaigns started with other organizations; however, when their names were associated with Anonymous, they could make use of the brand identity of the collective to produce identification for their own causes. An example is the campaign against Monsanto. Though Anonymous had already initiated a campaign against Monsanto and genetically modified food in general, as a part of a movement called #Operation Green Rights, it was not the collective that created the march in 2013. In this case, the main website that organised the March Against Monsanto, which happened all over the world on 25 May 213, announced that Anonymous was a sponsor, but not the organiser. As a sponsor, Anonymous promoted the cause in its social media profiles, such as Twitter, Facebook, and Youtube, calling the attention of Anons to the March. By doing that, the collective was using the organisational power of cyber-activism in order to transfer the energy from Anonymous to the March, trying to mobilise a large number of people to go to the streets and protest against Monsanto. One piece of evidence that this transfer works is that the March had a large number of people using Guy Fawkes mask.

Thus, as the symbols used by Anonymous are now able to stand by themselves and fully represent the collective, they have become powerful carriers and transfers of brand identification. By contrast, dissociation can also happen. When people do not feel compelled by the message carried by Anonymous or even condemn the actions taken by the collective, they tend to automatically reject an idea promoted under the name of Anonymous. The coexistence of the two possibilities, identification and dissociation, shows how the cyber-activist collective can really work as a brand, since the same phenomena can be seen in the market-place. In other words, people tend to buy new products released by brands that they like and reject new products whose brands are not part of their identities. As a consequence, when Anonymous created its visual identity as a cyber-activist brand, the same process can be observed in the campaigns promoted by the collective.

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